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SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES TO OVER-RAPID INDUSTRIALIZATION
(Item 4(2))

Report prepared by J.D.N. Versluys (UNESCO)

How far are there really alternatives to the rapid growth of cities was the first question to be discussed. Is planning really possible, and if so, is it desirable? In the discussion it came out that although there was certainly some scope for planning, the existing situation could be only modified, not fundamentally changed. However, by the location of administrative services and state industries, by building programmes and fixing their rent, by providing transport facilities, by a system of permits for establishments of industries, or retail trade, etc. the government can certainly have considerable influence on the pattern of development.

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The American delegate, however, warned against too much planning. A planning service which makes a mistake bears a very grave responsibility although it was not denied that individual entrepreneurs also made mistakes, but these did not have such a large scale effect. A system in which certain freedom was left to individuals within a general framework of planned development seemed an acceptable solution.

If planning is needed, it is important to know where the balance lies between urban and rural development. It is not possible to give off-hand an answer to this question. In India 70 per cent of the population lives on agriculture and is not quite able to produce enough for the country; in the United States the percentage is 12 and a large surplus is produced; in the United Kingdom 5 per cent lives on agriculture but there is a deficit. What is the "right" proportion? It obviously depends on the socio-economic structure of the country concerned how far urbanization should go, how many cities are really needed.

The reason of existence of a city is the opportunity it provides for division of labour. In the city there is a great diversity of skills which makes it possible to procure a wide range of articles and services. The range of needs and services therefore determines the degree of urbanization. This poses the problem of needs.

Every culture has its own value system and in that system there is a certain set of goods and services which are "normal" for an individual belonging to a certain group in that culture.

It is not always realized how deeply the behaviour of each individual is conditioned by the culture to which he belongs. There are relatively few human actions which are not fully accounted for by the culture in which he lives, for even creative work is little more than drawing a little further the line that had already been indicated by the culture. All the more so in every day life. There is a large set of automatic reactions which facilitate life considerably. Herskovits in an article in the International

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Social Science Bulletin[1] gives the example of speech. After the human being has learned how to speak, what muscles to use to utter certain sounds which have a certain meaning in his society, his speaking becomes automatic which "frees the individual to give conscious thought to what he is going to say, and makes it unnecessary to pay attention to the mechanisms of speech, he must use in saying it".[2] Even seemingly fully spontaneous utterances are culturally conditioned. When a child who has grown up in a Malay speaking society falls and hurts himself he will cry "aduh", but a child grown up in an English speaking society will say "outch" in the same circumstances. The kind of food we enjoy and of clothes we like depends on our culture with only slight individual deviations.

Every individual has in his mind a "norm" or "standard" of living and his actual "level" of living ought to correspond to that standard.[3]

Where the range of needs is very limited every household is nearly self-sufficient. In small villages in most Asian countries one may not find a single shop, or perhaps a very small one. Prof. Isomura stated in his paper (URB/11, p.12) that one finds "11.3 stores in the rural areas against 24.5 in the urban areas per 1,000 persons". Moreover, the size and variety of shops in urban centres will certainly be larger.

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1/ M.J. Herskovits, Motivation and Culture Pattern in Technological Change ISS B, Vol.VI, No.3, p. 388ff.

2/ Herskovitz op.cit. p. 392.

3/ See also Lasker, Standards and Planes of Living in the Far East, New York, 1952.

This difference is of the greatest influence on the outlook of village people. In a small village in India or Indonesia where there is practically no division of labour and, therefore, no specialization, it is understandable that, as there is no difference in the quality of experience, the quantity only counts. This explains the influence of old people (although there are also other factors). It is interesting, again, to note that the very few like the village teacher who do have another kind of experience, are in high esteem. In the city, on the other hand, where there is an enormous range of specialization which means a rich variety in experience, the respect for the old is far less. The value systems of city dwellers and village people widely differ, especially in Asian countries where these differences are so much deeper as was pointed out in earlier discussions.

When turning back to the balance between urban and rural development, it was found that, although no particular figure could be stated as the desirable proportion because of the different social-economic and value systems, nevertheless the percentage of persons depending on agriculture in the densely populated areas of Asia was certainly too high. Various survey in different countries in Asia seem to indicate that even without a change in techniques, approximately 30 per cent of the rural workers could be dismissed without any appreciable loss in agricultural production.

It is obvious that such enormous numbers cannot be absorbed by the cities. What solutions can be found?

Is a decrease to be expected in the rate of population growth? In only one country of Asia, in Japan, such a decrease has now clearly started: the birth rate went down from 31 per thousand in 1919-23 to 19 per thousand in 1954.[1] However, a large percentage of this decrease is due to abortion, a means which is not acceptable to most other countries of Asia. The other countries are in the middle of what has been called the "demographic revolution", namely a very high natural increase due to a strong decrease in the death rate brought about by better hygienic and medical measures which is not balanced by a lower birth rate. The result is a natural increase as high as about 3% per year as reported from Ceylon and Malaya, for instance. India has now developed a scheme for birth control clinics which seem to have more success in the towns than in rural areas. Various reasons can be given for this difference, but most important seems to be that the urge for family planning is stronger in the cities where better education and a higher level of living make people aware of the importance of maintaining that level and of aiming at a higher standard. This also brought out the question whether this differential fertility would not endanger the quality of the population, as it was feared that the procreation of the less talented part of the population would be markedly faster than that of the other group. However, it was pointed out that it was not a matter of higher intelligence which created the difference, but of opportunity for education. It was clear from experiences in other countries that birth control gradually permeated the whole society and, although the "illiterate masses" seemed to grow faster in the first instance than the intelligentsia, this difference disappeared with the spread of education.

One of the Indonesian participants pointed to a solution in quite a different direction which was more acceptable to his country, namely, "transmigration". It was not only expected that the overpopulation of Java could somewhat diminish by the migration of colonists to the Outer Islands, but this movement might also substantially contribute towards the development of those underpopulated areas.

1/ Prof. Eiichi Isomura, Urbanization in Japan, Conf. paper URB/11 p.22.

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However, it was agreed that family planning nor migration would be able to solve the problem, although they might give some relief to over-populated rural areas. As the countries of Asia are predominantly agricultural, it seemed to be necessary to find the solution, partly at least, in agricultural improvement. By the intensification and diversification of agriculture it should be possible to bring about a higher productivity per worker. Such changes in agriculture would certainly require more workers per acre, and this might provide some solution. However, it was realized that this would require, in most cases, more than just the introduction of cash crops or a switch to horticulture, as the prerequisites would be a steady water supply, agricultural education, and rural development in general. This should include provision of more and better amenities in rural areas in order to make the village a more agreeable place to live in. If such a change would succeed, it might mean a double advantage: a large number of un- and under-employed workers could be absorbed who are now potential migrants to the cities, and the gulf between village and city culture would become narrower. For this new kind of agriculture would require more careful methods based on scientific research, would bring about a certain specialization, would enable village people to aim at a higher standard of living and to bring them closer to the understanding of city mentality. This would be enhanced by their more numerous and intensive contacts with the city or town, as their economy would change from a largely subsistence to a market economy.

Finally, the decentralization of industries was discussed in its social aspects. The example of Japan quoted in the ECAFE paper (URB/3, pp. 2-3) and its small industries seemed of particular importance. It seemed interesting to add that 54% of Japan's industrial workers were engaged in small establishments of 5 persons or less in the thirties when Japan's industrial production was probably at its peak. These workshops needed limited capital equipment. Such small industries are possible when there is an excellent economic organization providing for regular marketing of the products, cheap power supply (usually electricity) and long working hours. The social aspects of these industries

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are certainly not only favourable. Labour laws cannot easily be enforced in such small establishments and amenities available in large factories are usually not provided. Moreover, one should not forget that these industries are often situated in large cities and thus may even help city growth, although it is certain that a large part is to be found in villages or small towns.

Definite advantages are: the workers need not leave their families; personal relationship with the employer and fellow-workers; the villager learns the value of time; his sense of precision is sharpened; some working discipline is learnt although these small establishments do not have the rigid organization of large factories; there is scope for the educated young man who now finds work in his own village instead of going to the city and so draining the village from its best elements. All this again helps to bridge the gap between village and city. There are two more advantages, namely, the large number of independent "industrialists" possible in such an organization which enlarges the number of people accustomed to taking decisions and, finally, the understanding of the machine with which the labourers work will give them a greater feeling of security.

It is not always realized that in a small establishment with simple machinery it is possible for the worker to have a perfect understanding of how the machine works, and how it serves him. He can rely upon his tools and knows how to handle them and to maintain them. This gives the worker in a small and simple industry a definite advantage over his colleague in a large factory with complicated machinery where the individual worker only carries out a small part of the total manufacturing process without being able to understand or to control the total industrial process. This makes his work automatic. His lack of understanding inevitably influences his whole outlook: as he is accustomed to not understanding his immediate environment he might be an easy prey for superstition or political humbug. He will not have the feeling of security his fellow worker may have who really understands his machines and so takes the habit of wanting to understand the things of his environment.

/Mr. Phillips

Mr. Phillips (UNESCO) whom Mr. Versluys called upon to supplement his statement said the subject of alternatives raised questions of priorities. Although the over-all possibilities of fundamental change in urbanisation might be small, nonetheless at the level of specific programmes, the choice of alternatives could be of vital importance. He listed a number of the factors which had to be taken into account in making decisions which had social consequences. Mr. Phillips also thought that as a matter of balance emphasis should also be placed upon the role of urban areas in stimulating the process of innovation and imitation which played a vital role in economic growth. Social change and innovation sometimes resulted in an increase of crime and had disruptive effect which was the price of change, but conformity in too rigid cultural lines was not stimulating to progress. The extent of the social disruption a community could bear depended upon the strength of its cultural core and the degree of social cohesion which could be shown during change. This varied from country to country and was affected to be taken into account by policy makers from the sociological angle when determining problems of the time to which Dr. Versluys had referred. The positive side of the picture was that human beings showed a high degree of adaptibility, particularly where educational facilities were available and there was an economic incentive for them to make the change quickly.

Prof. Hauser finally remarked that both views were valid: the city is the place for the innovator, but, if he is a social innovator like Buddha or Socrates, or Christ or Mohamed, he may run the risk of being killed, but he may also become a king. The economic innovator may become a millionaire or go to jail. Cities produced the great arts and the universities. But also the great oriminals. The fact is that the mixture of cultures which is typical for real city life, brings about innovations, although it procures, at the same time, great difficulties of adjustment.